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Major UM grant to fund research on the brain, neurological disorders

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UNIVERSITY RELATIONS • MISSOULA, MT 59812 • 406-243-2522 • FAX: 406-243-4520

NEWS RELEASE

Sept. 29, 2005

Contact: Richard Bridges, professor, UM College of Health Professions and Biomedical Sciences, (406) 243-4972.

MAJOR UM GRANT TO FUND RESEARCH ON THE BRAIN, NEUROLOGICAL DISORDERS

MISSOULA —

The National Institutes of Health will provide more than \$9.5 million to a University of Montana center over the next five years to fund research on the brain and neurological disorders. The grant renews funding for UM's Center for Structural and Functional Neuroscience.

The center works to understand the chemical and molecular processes used by brain cells to communicate with one another, and how these processes are disrupted by disorders such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, stroke and depression. The grant will help continue center operations until 2010.

The center is directed by Richard Bridges, the grant's principal investigator, who said the award is among the largest ever given by NIH in Montana.

"Our center stands apart from many such neuroscience centers in medical schools," Bridges said. "We integrate faculty from a wide spectrum of basic science disciplines such as chemistry, biochemistry, biophysics, molecular biology and genetics to collaboratively investigate diseases of the nervous system."

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He said the grant is part of the National Center for Research Resources Institutional Development Award program, which works to enhance biomedical research in states that traditionally have not had strongly competitive programs in health science research.

Housed in UM's College of Health Professions and Biomedical Sciences, the center includes faculty from UM's Department of Biomedical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, the Division of Biomedical Sciences and the Department of Chemistry, as well as the Department of Cell Biology and Neuroscience at Montana State University in **Bozeman** and the McLaughlin Research Institute in **Great Falls**.

"Professor Bridges and his collaborative persona have made tremendous contributions to the University," said Dave Forbes, dean of the College of Health Professions and Biomedical Sciences. "His collaboration with a number of campus constituencies has greatly strengthened the level of scientific endeavor on this campus."

Bridges said the center was first recognized by NIH as a Center for Biomedical Research Excellence in 2000. The center's success during the past five years in recruiting new neuroscientists, building collaborative ties, increasing individual research grant numbers and establishing a new neuroscience doctoral program all contributed to the decision to continue funding the project. UM is among the first such centers in the country to receive a renewal.

He said a demonstrated commitment on the part of the state also was a key factor in the evaluation process.

"The Montana Board of Research and Commercialization Technology played an important role in this capacity," Bridges said. "The board provided matching funds on a

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competitive basis to support applied biomedical research within the center that has the potential to enhance economic development.”

He said the award will be used to recruit at least four new faculty members, operate state-of-the-art instruments, fund graduate students and create “seed projects” for young researchers.

The center will occupy the top two floors of a 60,000-square-foot Skaggs Building research addition now under construction.

“This (Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence) award and the grants brought in by our investigators represent an important part of the University’s growing funding base,” Bridges said, “as well as the School of Pharmacy’s current national ranking of fifth among all U.S. schools of pharmacy in terms of total NIH funded dollars.”

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